

## NOTES on the McClaren-Pochin Family

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Charles Benjamin Bright McLaren, 1st Baron Aberconway PC (Edinburgh, 12 May 1850 – 23 January 1934, Belgrave Square) was a Scottish Liberal politician and jurist.

### Career

The son of Duncan McLaren and Priscilla Bright (sister of John Bright), McLaren was educated at the Heidelberg University, Bonn University and Edinburgh University, from which he graduated with the degree of Master of Arts. He began his career in journalism, but turned to the law and in 1874, he was admitted to Lincoln's Inn as a barrister. Six years later, he was elected to the House of Commons as MP for Stafford; he served that constituency until 1886. In 1892, he returned to the Commons as MP for Bosworth, which he represented until 1910.

McLaren's political career advanced during his second term. In 1897, he was invested a Queen's Counsel, and, in 1902, became Sir Charles McLaren, Baronet of Bodnant, in the county of Denbigh. He was appointed to the Privy Council in 1908, and held the office of Justice of the Peace in Middlesex, Flint, Denbighshire, and Surrey. In 1911, a year after he left the Commons (his son replaced him), he was created Baron Aberconway in the Peerage of the United Kingdom.

His father-in-law, a noted industrialist, died in 1895, and McLaren became increasingly involved in the management of the companies inherited from him. He would become chairman of the Tredegar Iron and Coal Company and several others.

Lord Aberconway received various honours throughout his life, including:

Order of the Sacred Treasures (Japan) (3rd class)

Order of Takova (Serbia)

Commander Order of the Redeemer (Greece).

He and his wife were friends of James McNeill Whistler and owned several of his works.

On his death in 1934 at Bodnant, the barony and baronetcy passed to his eldest son, Henry McLaren.

### [edit] Family

On March 6, 1877, he married Laura Elizabeth Pochin (d. 1933), the daughter of Henry Davis Pochin, in Westminster. The couple had four children:

Henry McLaren, 2nd Baron Aberconway (1879–1953)

Hon. Florence Priscilla McLaren (1881–1964), married Sir Henry Norman, 1st Baronet

Hon. Elsie Dorothea McLaren (c.1884 – 15 May 1973), married Sir Edward Johnson-Ferguson, 2nd Baronet

Lt. Hon. Francis Walter Stafford McLaren (June 16, 1886 – 30 August 1917), married Barbara Jekyll and had issue

### Henry McLaren, 2nd Baron Aberconway

Henry Duncan McLaren, 2nd Baron Aberconway CBE (April 16, 1879 – May 23, 1953), was a British

politician, horticulturalist and industrialist. He was the son of Charles McLaren, 1st Baron Aberconway and Laura Pochin.

### Career

He was educated at Eton and obtained a MA from Balliol College, Oxford. In 1903 he became a barrister of Lincoln's Inn.

In 1906 he was elected MP for West Staffordshire as a Liberal, and was Private Under-Secretary to the President of the Board of Trade, David Lloyd George, until 1908. In 1910, he stood for his father's old seat of Bosworth and replaced him. He left politics in 1922, and succeeded his father in the Barony in 1934.

McLaren was also a notable industrialist, and chaired companies from both sides of the family, including John Brown & Company. Around the end of his political career, in 1920, he had Aberconway House built as a residence in Mayfair. He would also inherit the family estate (originally his maternal grandfather's) in Bodnant, where he extensively developed and added to the Bodnant Garden. He was an avid horticulturalist and took interest in the breeding of rhododendrons and magnolias. He sponsored several botanical collectors, including George Forrest, and *Rhododendron aberconwayi* is named in his honor.

### Family

He married Christabel Mary Melville MacNaghten (1890–1974) and had five children:

Hon. Elizabeth Mary McLaren (31 May 1911 – 4 December 1991), married and had issue

Charles McLaren, 3rd Baron Aberconway (1913–2003)

S/Ldr. Hon. John Francis McLaren (1919–1953)

Dr. Hon. Anne McLaren (b. 1927)

Hon. Christopher Melville McLaren (b. 15 April 1934), married and has issue

Charles McLaren, 3rd Baron Aberconway JP (April 16, 1913 – February 4, 2003) was a British industrialist and horticulturalist.

Son of Henry McLaren, 2nd Baron Aberconway, he was educated at Eton, New College, Oxford, and became a barrister of the Middle Temple. As a young man, he became a director of John Brown & Company, the board of which was chaired by his father. Due to this connection, he took part in a secret, unofficial meeting of British industrialists with Hermann Göring in Sylt in 1939. The meeting was authorized by Lord Halifax and was intended as a last-ditch effort to forestall a German invasion of Poland through concessions. The mission was, of course, a failure; McLaren kept the meeting a secret until 2000.

During the Second World War, he joined the Royal Artillery, becoming a second lieutenant. After the war, he took a more active role in the family corporations, preparing to succeed his father. He was also a director of Westland Aircraft from 1947–1985. He was made a Justice of the Peace for Denbighshire in 1946, and High Sheriff of the county in 1950.

He married Deirdre Knewstub on December 6, 1941, and had three children:

1. Hon. Julia Harriet McLaren (b. September 22, 1942), married Capt. Charles Ridley and has issue
2. Dr. Hon. Caroline Mary McLaren (b. October 24, 1944), married Raimund Sargent and has issue
3. Henry Charles McLaren, 4th Baron Aberconway (b. 1948)

The couple divorced in 1949, and he married Ann Bullard (née Aymer) the same year. They had one son: 1. Hon. Michael Duncan McLaren, QC (b. November 29, 1958), married Caroline Stacey and has issue; present manager of Bodnant Garden

In 1953, he succeeded his father in the barony, the chairmanship of John Brown and English China Clays, and various other industrial interests. He would continue in these chairmanships until 1986 and 1984, respectively. Despite his corporate responsibilities, Lord Aberconway took a keen interest in horticulture. Besides maintaining the family's Bodnant Garden, he was the President of the Royal Horticultural Society 1961–1983 and oversaw the management of the Chelsea Flower Show. His annual assertion became famous:

I think I can say, without fear of contradiction, that this is the finest Chelsea Flower Show ever. Despite inheriting a seat in the House of Lords, he rarely attended. Throughout his life, he enjoyed writing pithy, memorable and topical letters to The Times.

Floral lord kept Goering talks secret

February 13 2003

Lord Aberconway, Industrialist, horticulturalist 1913-2003

Lord Aberconway, otherwise known as Charles Melville McLaren, the long-time chairman of both John Brown, the Clydeside shipbuilding firm, and English China Clays, and also a master gardener, has died aged 89.

Three years ago, Aberconway belatedly unburdened himself of a 60-year-old guilty secret. He told a Tory historian, Andrew Roberts, that as a 26-year-old he had been one of seven British businessmen dispatched secretly by Neville Chamberlain's pro-appeasement government to try to stop an Anglo-German war over Poland.

In 1939, after Germany invaded Czechoslovakia, Hermann Goering, Hitler's No.2, approached Birger Dalherus, a Swedish civil engineer then working in London. Goering wanted Dalherus to be a neutral go-between so he could make unofficial contact with the British government.

One of Dalherus's business contacts was Charles Spencer, a prominent Conservative and a director of the Clydeside shipbuilder John Brown - of which Aberconway was also a director. With the private blessing of Hitler and the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, a meeting between Goering and his advisers and the group of seven British businessmen was arranged in a farmhouse on the German Baltic island of Sylt.

The seven made their separate ways to Sylt for the meeting. Their purpose was to offer a "second Munich" - a four-power agreement involving Britain, Germany, France and Italy - to make further concessions to German demands for lebensraum (room for living) on condition that the Nazis did not invade Poland.

This offer, authorised by the leading appeaser Lord Halifax, shocked Halifax's biographer Roberts, who had not found any reference to this last-minute offer in either Foreign Office documents or Halifax's private papers. Aberconway showed Roberts 38 pages of documents.

It seems possible that, albeit with the best of intentions, they may have encouraged the Nazi leadership in its view that Britain did not have the stomach for a fight. Three weeks later, the blitzkrieg on Poland began.

Aberconway never accepted that he and his colleagues were wrong to go to Germany, and rejected any

implication that there had been some kind of clandestine plot to betray Poland. "We were there to make absolutely clear to Goering that Britain was prepared to fight for Poland. The government felt this message was not getting through," he said.

As Charles Melville McLaren, the third baron was educated at Eton, New College, Oxford, and the Middle Temple, and grew up in a palatial home in South Street, Chelsea. There his beautiful and talented mother, Christabel, entertained a wide range of devoted friends. Charles was 21 when his father inherited his title.

After Sylt, McLaren served as an officer in the Royal Artillery and, at the end of the war, set to work in earnest to understudy his father. He became a director of John Brown and many of its subsidiaries, and of Westland Aircraft. His wartime marriage to Deirdre Knewstub ended in 1949, after a son and two daughters. The same year he married Ann Bullard, with whom he also had a son.

In 1953 the second baron died, leaving McLaren the title, heavy shareholdings (1.5 million in China Clays alone) and the chairmanships of John Brown and English China Clays, the deputy chairmanships of Westland and later of Sun-Alliance and National Westminster, plus many subsidiaries of each. He inherited, too, some of his father's Clydeside tycoon traits, being tagged "the autocrat", according to the Sunday Times. "I do not care what people think of me," he volunteered.

Those were the days when English China Clays was the world's largest provider, and John Brown was still building Cunarders on the Clyde. Aberconway was, though, unfortunate that his years at the helm coincided with a crisis in shipbuilding and, despite his best efforts, he witnessed the closure of the shipyard.

Although he was successful in his bid to build the QE2, mounting costs and a shortage of skilled labour turned the contract into a loss-maker which probably hastened the yard's demise.

In 1986 the John Brown Group was sold to Trafalgar House and, at 73, Aberconway resigned as chairman. He had given up his chairmanship of English China Clays in 1984.

Increasingly, his remaining enthusiasm was concentrated on horticulture. He had inherited the presidency of the Royal Horticultural Association, which he held from 1961 to 1983, from his father, and dominated the annual Chelsea Flower Show for 20 years. He imposed his purist standards on exhibitors, resisted demands for more women on the RHS council and marshalled visitors in a new one-way circulatory system in the great marquee.

He also fought pressures to allow in guide dogs or make Chelsea more accessible to wheelchairs. He became famous for his annual dictum: "I think I can say, without fear of contradiction, that this is the finest Chelsea Flower Show ever." He was usually right.

His main satisfaction came from the world-famous Bodnant Gardens at Conway in north Wales. This was founded by his great-grandfather, Henry Pochin, who had bought the place in 1875 and begun its terraced improvements. The property was given to the National Trust by his father but Aberconway continued to direct the upkeep for the trust and lived in the house. In 1974 he added to his father's endowment with a gift of £131,000.

He made fortnightly visits to the gardens to admire his rhododendrons, even when he was fully stretched as an industrialist. He would stride around its 24 hectares in his knickerbockers, preceded by an immaculately clad butler, with his wife and the head gardener, Mr Puddle, at his side. If Aberconway was something of a local feudal lord in the Conway Valley - as a big landowner and the high sheriff of Denbighshire since 1950 - he did not have things all his own way. In 1982, he asked to cut down some 60 preserved trees in Prestatyn to build houses on his own land, but was refused permission.

Although he inherited his Lords seat with his title in 1953, he attended only once in 200 sessions and only when the whips were desperate for another Tory vote. Typically, he made his maiden speech, after 27 years, on the dangers of siting an airfield near the RHS's Wisley Gardens.

He much preferred short, sharp letters to the press, usually The Times. These urged London to plant coniferous ginkgo biloba trees, criticised union behaviour at Ford, dilated on the problems of being a JP and objected to the Parthenon Marbles being returned to Greece until the Louvre also yielded its imported loot.

He is survived by the Dowager Lady Ann, and five children, including a stepdaughter. The barony goes to his heir, Henry Charles McLaren.

The Guardian and Telegraph, London

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/02/12/1044927661990.html>

Henry Davis Pochin (1824–1895) was an industrial chemist. He was the son of a yeoman farmer of Leicestershire who served an apprenticeship to James Woolley (1811–1858), a manufacturing chemist in Manchester, and in course of time became his partner. Woolley died in 1858 and Pochin kept a manuscript diary of the illness, treatment and death of his partner. This diary is preserved in the Wellcome Trust Library. On Woolley's death Pochin became the sole proprietor.

Pochin is noted for two important inventions. Firstly, he developed a process for the clarification of rosin, a brown substance used to make soap, by passing steam through it so that after distillation it came out white, thus enabling the production of white soap. He sold the rights to this process to raise money to exploit his second invention, which was a process using ammonium sulfate and alumina as a low cost alternative to alumstone in the production of alum cake used in the manufacture of paper.

The process required china clay, and Pochin bought several china clay mines in Cornwall for this purpose. In time H. D. Pochin & Co. became one of the three largest British producers of china clay until they were acquired in 1932 by the English China Clays along with the second largest producer, Lovering, to form English China Clays Lovering Pochin & Co. Ltd (ECLP), with both Lovering and Pochin remaining shareholders. ECLP kept this name until it was able to buy the shares from the Lovering family and Pochin family. ECLP was restructured, and became a wholly owned subsidiary of the newly formed English China Clays group. ECLP was split up into four divisions; ECC construction materials, ECC quarries, and ECC transportation, and ECC international. ECC transportation was later merged into ECC international. Later the company divested all but two of its divisions, ECC International and ECC quarries. In 2000, the English China Clays group and its subsidiaries was bought by Imetal SA, which changed its name to Imerys. Imerys has kept ECC International subsidiary as its speciality china clay producing division under that name, even though it does not use that name or division logo, which have been replaced by the Imerys name and logo. Imerys is now the world's largest china clay producer.

Pochin's principal china clay works was the Gothers drying complex, near Roche, Cornwall. This consisted of a number of kilns, each served by a narrow gauge tramway, and was considered to be an extensive works in its day. The tramway was known simply as Pochin's Tramway, and ran from the Gothers works, across the Goss Moor to a loading wharf on the St Dennis Branch. The tramway was operated by a small fleet of steam locomotives known as "Pochin's Puffing Billies", carrying clay to the wharf in crude 3 plank wagons. Upon reaching the wharf, the clay would be loaded in to standard gauge wagons. Coal for firing the kilns was transferred from standard gauge wagons into the narrow gauge

tramway wagons for the return journey, the wagons were then cleaned of coal dust at Gothers before being loaded with clay for another trip. Due to the fact that the crude tramway wagons had no braking mechanism, the train operators developed a novel solution that involved jamming a piece of timber between the spokes of the wheels while the train was in motion.

Between 1863 and 1867, Alderman Pochin led a consortium of Manchester business men in the formation of a number of companies in the iron, steel and coal industries. The first of these, the Staveley Coal and Iron Company Limited, was also the first to be formed by David Chadwick (1821–1885) a Manchester accountant whose accounting methods in relation to capitallisation and depreciation have attracted interest even 100 years or more later.

Pochin was elected to Parliament in 1868 as one of two MP's for Stafford. He also held public office at times as a Deputy Lieutenant and as Justice of the Peace.

Henry Pochin was a director of The Tredegar Iron and Coal Company, that sunk two shafts (North and South) at Pochin Colliery, Tredegar, in 1876 to a depth of 340 yards; the first coal was brought to the surface in 1881. The mine was named after Pochin's daughter, Laura, who later married Charles McLaren, the Tredegar Company Chairman later created first Baron Aberconway.

Between 1871 and 1876 Henry Pochin had a residence in Llandudno, North Wales at Haulfre, on the south facing landward side of the Great Orme where he was able to pursue his passion for gardening in an extensive and steeply terraced garden that since 1929 has been under the care of the local authority and is freely open to the public.

In 1874 Pochin bought the Bodnant estate at Tal-y-Cafn in the Conwy Valley comprising 25 farms with the Bodnant House and over 80 acres of garden where he lived in active retirement. At Bodnant, Pochin realised the superb qualities of the Dell through which the estate river ran and after first strengthening the banks to deter erosion he set about planting with great American and Oriental conifers. In 1949, Bodnant Garden was given to the National Trust.